

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

October 28, 2004

The Honorable Michael Brown
Under Secretary of Homeland Security of Emergency Preparedness and Response
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C St., SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Secretary Brown:

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is playing a key role in Florida's recovery from Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne. But I'm deeply concerned that FEMA is still not doing enough to help storm-ravaged communities remove debris from private land.

On September 17, I wrote to you requesting that FEMA quickly designate areas with significant debris on private roads as public health hazards. This would allow FEMA to give local governments federal funds to help cover the cost of cleaning up such debris. Since that time, however, it seems little has been done by FEMA to cut through bureaucratic red tape and get relief to cash-strapped communities plagued by debris on private land.

To the contrary, I've seen reports that FEMA actually is making it more difficult for communities to get compensation for removing this debris. One report stated that communities seeking such reimbursement would first "have to document their efforts to make residents responsible for the cleanup under the nuisance abatement ordinances." The report went on to describe that a demonstration would typically require local governments to issue citations to property owners, hold hearings for owners to explain non-compliance and even put liens against property to recover cleanup costs.

If true, such requirements only would serve to further stress the capabilities of local governments and to endanger unnecessarily the health and safety of Florida residents. But more importantly, applying nuisance abatement ordinances to hurricane victims adds outrageous insult to injury. These Floridians already have suffered so much and shouldn't be put through the wringer by the same federal agency charged with helping them.

If ever a disaster has warranted FEMA to provide a swift and practical response to the issue of debris removal on private land, then this is it. I urge you again in this extreme case to take necessary steps to quickly grant FEMA aid to help communities remove debris from private land.

I look forward to your immediate response. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

